

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### A. Background of the Problem

In the context of English as a foreign language, vocabulary mastery plays a very vital role in the acquisition of language skills such as speaking, listening, reading, and writing. Vocabulary provides students with the means or tools needed to understand and communicate in the foreign language. Failure to master English vocabulary makes it very difficult for learners to communicate in English. Therefore, vocabulary mastery is an essential component of learning English as a foreign language.

Vocabulary refers more than just the meaning of words, but also include the understanding of the forms of words, their pronunciation, and the ability to use them effectively in context. Therefore, the ability of interpret language input language and construct meanings is important in language learning. Vocabulary mastery plays an important role in helping EFL learners develop their receptive skills, especially listening comprehension.

One of the abilities that can be challenging for students to acquire when acquiring communication skills through English language is listening, as they may face difficulties in terms of speech rate, vocabulary, pronunciation, and accent employed in the process of communication (Alzamil, 2021:366). In spoken English communication, words are said at a fast pace in many ways; hence, it is difficult for learners to understand





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their meaning. Hence, learners must possess sufficient vocabulary in order to understand the message.

The connection between vocabulary mastery and listening comprehension implies the ability of language learners to use their vocabulary mastery to enhance their listening comprehension in English as a foreign language (EFL) situations (Staehr, 2020:6). Vocabulary mastery is considered critical for listening comprehension as learners should first identify the words in the spoken text in order to understand its meaning. Limited of vocabulary often hinders the identification of key words by EFL learners.

In this regard, Hulstijn (2021:14) notes that having vocabulary mastery aids students in understanding spoken texts easily. Students who have an extensive vocabulary find it easier to parse speech, identify familiar words, and draw appropriate conclusions from spoken text. Having vocabulary mastery reduces cognitive load in the process of listening comprehension.

In addition, Pham and Le (Pham & Le, 2025:7) claims that learners with more extensive vocabulary mastery have better listening comprehension since they are able to process spoken text at a faster rate and provide an appropriate interpretation given new information. Vocabulary mastery allows students to focus less on identifying individual words and more on understanding the overall meaning of the spoken text. Similarly, Van Zeeland (2020:9) said that vocabulary mastery has a great influence on listening comprehension, especially for learners who come across



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unfamiliar words in authentic listening content. Although learners may know the grammatical rules of language, limited vocabulary mastery may hinder them from understanding spoken text because they cannot recognize the meaning of the words they hear.

Buck (2021:21) says that vocabulary is an important contributor to listening comprehension because learners' ability to comprehend the spoken language depends heavily on the level of vocabulary that he or she possesses. In this regard, it is crucial for EFL students who have little exposure to spontaneous spoken English. Therefore, students with limited vocabulary mastery may still find it difficult to comprehend spoken language even when they have been taught listening strategies.

Although the relationship between vocabulary mastery and listening comprehension is strong, vocabulary instruction in EFL classes is still commonly delivered through written materials, with limited attention to listening-based vocabulary exposure. Other factors, such as English exposure, learning methods, and motivation, may also affects students' vocabulary mastery and listening comprehension. Because textual resources are widely used in EFL teaching and learning, learners in EFL contexts such as Indonesia may have limited access to vocabulary exposure through listening materials. Although students can learn vocabulary by themselves, the learning process may not always ensure adequate practice of proper pronunciation and application of vocabulary in spoken context.

This situation is particularly relevant for EFL learners in Indonesia because they receives so much of their English input from sources outside



the classroom environment. Although senior high school students are assumed to have basic vocabulary and exposure to various English learning media, many of them still have difficulty comprehending spoken English. This implies that there is a gap between the vocabulary mastery and their listening comprehension.

Based on the researcher's observation during the teaching and learning process at SMA Negeri 1 Tembilahan Hulu, the eleventh-grade students experienced difficulties in comprehending spoken English during listening activities. Based on the result of the preliminary observation, it was found that some students were not able to recognize familiar English words when those words appeared in spoken form, had difficulty identifying the main ideas and specific information in spoken texts, and still found it difficult to understand the vocabulary used in the listening materials. These conditions indicate that there is a gap between students' vocabulary mastery and their listening comprehension. Therefore, this research is considered urgent because it is expected to explain whether vocabulary mastery is significantly related to listening comprehension and to provide practical input for English teachers to integrate vocabulary learning with listening activities. Theoretically, this research is expected to provide a better understanding of the relationship between vocabulary mastery and listening comprehension among EFL learners. Practically, this research may provide English teachers with useful information about the importance of integrating vocabulary learning into listening activities. Therefore, the objective of this research is to examine the correlation between vocabulary mastery and

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listening comprehension among eleventh-grade students of Class XI.10 of SMA Negeri 1 Tembilahan Hulu.

## B. Identification of the Problems

Based on the background of the problem, the problems identified in this study are as follows:

1. Although students have learned a significant amount of English vocabulary, they sometimes cannot recognize even very familiar words when listening to spoken English.
2. Since vocabulary acquisition is mainly focused on written forms, students' ability to identify vocabulary when it comes in spoken language becomes restricted.
3. Because of the speed in uttering speech sounds and pronunciation in English, there are those who find it difficult to understand it.
4. There is ample evidence of an existing gap in between, attributable to the difficulty of understanding English despite exposure to English learning medium/media containing listening materials/components.

## C. Limitation of the Problem

Based on the context and identification of the difficulties, this study will focus on the relationship between vocabulary knowledge and listening comprehension. The subjects of this study will be Grade *XI* students from Class *XI.10* of SMA Negeri 1 Tembilahan Hulu. This class will be chosen because it satisfies the research criteria, particularly in terms of students' exposure to advanced English learning and their learning experiences with vocabulary and listening comprehension. As a result, the purpose of this



study is to determine whether vocabulary knowledge has a substantial relationship with students' listening comprehension.

#### D. Research Question

Based on the research, the researchers only determined the research question to be answered, namely:

1. Is there a significant relationship between vocabulary mastery and listening comprehension of eleventh-grade students of class *XI.10* at SMA Negeri 1 Tembilahan Hulu?

#### E. Purpose of the Research

The purpose of this research is to examine the relationship between vocabulary mastery and listening comprehension of eleventh-grade students of class *XI.10* at SMA Negeri 1 Tembilahan Hulu, in order to gain a clearer understanding of how students' vocabulary mastery is related to their listening comprehension.

#### F. Significance of the Research

The findings of this research are hopefully to be beneficial for the following parties:

1. English Teachers

It is expected that this study will provide insights into how vocabulary mastery improves the listening comprehension of students and could also help teachers design more effective exercises in listening and vocabulary learning.

2. Students





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The findings of this study will help students understand how vocabulary mastery influences listening comprehension and encourage them to expand their vocabularies for the purpose of enhancing their ability to listen.

### 3. Future Researchers

It is expected that future researchers who would want to conduct further research on vocabulary mastery and its effect on listening comprehension will refer to this study.

## G. Definition of Key Terms

### 1. Vocabulary Mastery

The students' ability to recognize and comprehend English words, especially those used to communicate spokenly among themselves, is said to be Vocabulary Mastery. In essence, it is students understanding word meanings as well as responding to those word meanings appropriately when recognizing certain vocal communications among themselves. In EFL acquisition among students, mastering vocabulary is very crucial to their understanding of vocal communications among themselves and for building their auditory proficiency (Widyasari & Widodo, 2022:54).

### 2. Listening Comprehension

The capacity of students to recognize words in spoken texts to derive meaning is termed listening comprehension. For learners to derive meaning, it is imperative to understand the process of decoding used. Vocabulary is significant in listening comprehension in EFL classes, as

lack of adequate vocabulary may limit understanding of messages since just a little is required to impede understanding of messages (Hamouda, 2022, p.19).

### 3. English as a Foreign Language

English language learning in an environment wherein the English language is not the prevailing medium of native communication is referred to as English as a Foreign Language, or EFL for short. In English-speaking countries or locales such as Indonesia, English language knowledge among students is achieved through regular class practices with limited out-of-school English language contact hours (Derakhshan & Shakki, 2021:4).

